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Gray & Co. gives up contract with Angola

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Less than two months after taking on the Marxist Angolan government as a client, the Washington public relations firm of Gray & Co. said yesterday it will no longer represent the regime.

A statement released by the firm late yesterday noted simply that it has "completed" its activities with the Angolan government. But other events suggest the firm dropped its new client to satisfy clients who were disturbed by the connection.

The Moroccan ambassador told The Washington Times Friday that he had severed relations with Gray & Co., which had a \$360,000 annual contract representing Morocco.

But Gray's vice president, Frank Mankiewicz, said yesterday his firm still has its Moroccan account.

Members of the Young Conservative Foundation are taking credit for Gray & Co.'s change of heart. They say letters they sent to the firm's clients helped kill the \$20,000-a-month Angolan contract. Several YCF members were arrested inside Gray & Co.'s Georgetown offices last month when they chained themselves to a railing to protest the Angolan contract.

"We sent letters to all of Gray's clients — the ones who are anti-communist — telling them what Gray & Co. was doing," YCF president Lee Bellinger said. "We think

we were hitting a nerve. We got to them (Gray & Co.) where it hurt — their claim that they control media events. That, and inquiries from their other clients, really hurt them."

"There is absolutely no truth to that," Mr. Mankiewicz said. His firm has received no calls from clients regarding its Angolan contract, he said.

"And if they've been sending letters to our clients," Mr. Mankiewicz said, "we'll be looking into that. Inducing a breach of contract is serious. But when you let children play with Xerox machines, I guess things like that can happen."

In its press statement, Gray said its delivery to the State Department yesterday of a policy message from

Angola "completes our activities for the government of Angola."

"We believe we have reopened a communications window between the United States and that government which — unlike other nations with which we are in conflict — has no ambassador here or other diplomatic relations," the release said.

Representatives of the firm met with top government leaders in Angola and later conveyed to U.S. officials "Angola's willingness to negotiate a withdrawal of Cuban troops ... with the withdrawal of South Africa from Namibia [South West Africa] and the end of South African armed attacks on Angola," the company said.

The firm said its vice chairman, Adm. Daniel Murphy, who handled the account, "worked with determination to open the communications window. His actions only can benefit the established U.S. foreign policy objectives of a negotiated settlement in Angola." Adm. Murphy is former commander of the U.S. Sixth Fleet and former deputy director of the CIA.

Gray & Co. announced early in February that it would represent the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, which took power in

the former Portuguese colony in 1975 with the help of a Cuban expeditionary force.

The February announcement followed a weeklong visit and media blitz in Washington by freedom fighter Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. Mr. Savimbi's group is trying to force the Angolan government back to the bargaining table to discuss the 1975 accords on national reconciliation.

Mr. Savimbi's Washington trip, orchestrated through a \$600,000 annual contract with the Washington public relations firm of Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelly, was successful in that he won assurance of "moral support" and perhaps military support from the Reagan administration.

Both of the public relations firms have staffs that include former White House aides and Reagan campaign officials. Letters the Young

Conservative Foundation sent to Gray & Co.'s foreign clients said the firm's "tawdry deal" with the Angolan government was brought to the firm by Adm. Murphy, who served as chief of staff for Vice President George Bush for five years.

The letters were sent to 11 clients, including the embassies of Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Haiti and South Korea. Other letters went to foreign businesses that Gray & Co. represents in Washington.

Reflecting on the brouhaha over the firm's Angolan contract, Mr. Mankiewicz said he believes Gray & Co. will gain business because of it.

"Judging from the atmosphere around town, people are saying they're pleased we've taken on this kind of client. You have to remember that the only country that supports Savimbi is South Africa," Mr. Mankiewicz said. (In fact, 12 African nations supply covert aid to the Savimbi forces.)

Angola's Marxist government again will be without formal representation in Washington, but "now they have a lot more friends," Mr. Mankiewicz said. "And negotiations, I assume, will continue."